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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000280

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: LAGOS STATE GOVERNOR TINUBU RECAPS
ELECTORAL POLITICS, THUS FAR

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER FOR REASONS
1.5(B) AND (D)

1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador accompanied by Consul General and Staff Assistant (note-taker) met a politically confident and relaxed Lagos State Governor, Bola Ahmed Tinubu on January 24. Despite the allegations being tossed at him, Tinubu appeared self-assured and convinced of his political longevity. The Ambassador and the Governor discussed the results of the recent party conventions and handicapped the April general elections. End Summary.

2. (C) Ambassador Jeter began the meeting by congratulating the Governor on his nomination as the Alliance for Democracy (AD) Lagos State gubernatorial candidate. The Governor responded modestly, but stated that he was virtually unopposed. When asked about his former Deputy Governor and now staunch foe, Tinubu said that Bucknor- Ackerele joined the ANPP, not finding success there, she skipped to the NDP, where she will likely be the gubernatorial candidate.

3. (C) Despite having supported the presence of additional political parties, Tinubu now expressed concern that there were too many parties. Instead of strengthening democracy, he feared the presence of roughly 30 parties would weaken democracy and perplex the Nigerian electorate. On a practical level, the Governor said, it is difficult for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to manage; with so many parties, minor tasks like constructing comprehensible ballots posed a challenge. He continued that INEC's problems are compounded by insufficient funding to prevent voter fraud. The Ambassador agreed that funding was a serious issue but gave a different perspective, saying INEC's challenges could, if overcome, be viewed as precedent-setting, ultimately strengthening democracy and establishing examples for future elections.

4. (C) Asked about the recent PDP convention, Tinubu stated that the outcome was uncertain even up to the time the ballots were cast. Adding suspense to the PDP convention, important governors such as Katsina's Yar'Adua and Kaduna's Makarfi waned in their support for Obasanjo. The opposition to Obasanjo was understandable, according to Tinubu. On the policy front, Obasanjo under-performed in several areas, most profoundly on the budget and resource allocation. According to Tinubu, Obasanjo low-balled the price of oil in GON budgetary projections. The FY02 budget, he said, was based on \$18 per barrel, but oil sold at over \$22 per barrel for most of the year. Tinubu asked where the difference was being deposited, subtly accusing Obasanjo of malfeasance. The Ambassador asked Tinubu what he thought of Obasanjo's troubles leading up to the PDP primaries. Playing both sides of the fence and contradicting his prior comments, the Governor said that OO's intra-party troubles were designed to teach him a lesson. The party always intended to re-elect him, but wanted to remind Obasanjo to whom he owed allegiance.

5. (C) The Governor said that Obasanjo's trials and tribulations have been a serious wake-up call. An outstanding question is whether Obasanjo will honor commitments made during his moment of desperation at the PDP convention. Tinubu explained that Obasanjo would destroy his own legacy if he seeks revenge against Atiku. Obasanjo's ego is big, the Governor said, but he's smart enough not to challenge Atiku. In fact, in the next administration Atiku will gain more prominence and power, possibly in the form of a deal in which Obasanjo would be the traveling Statesman and Atiku would spearhead domestic policy.

16. (C) The Ambassador asked about ANPP's Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari's prospects in the Southern States. Tinubu said that Buhari possibly could do well in the South-South but not in the South-East or South-West where religion is less important than personality, political record, sentiment, and emotions. Tinubu estimated that Buhari will garner 33% of the vote overall but will not win any Christian votes in the North. As it now stands, the oil dichotomy bill will mobilize the North against Obasanjo if he gives away too much; Tinubu said. Only Buhari could concede the continental shelf and get away with it.

17. (C) Tinubu revealed that Alek Ekweume was actually the AD's preferred PDP candidate and expressed regret about his defeat. The Governor said that the AD wanted Ekweume to run and even win, because he was a civilian and civilian governments are more responsive to governors' interests. But Tinubu said that Ekweume did not have a chance because he made critical blunders early on, including insufficient funding and starting his campaign too late.

18. (C) The Ambassador led the Governor down a discussion of other "winners and losers" in the electoral season thus far. Both the Ambassador and the Governor agreed that the biggest winners were the governors and Atiku, who proved their relevance and weight in the primary process by controlling Obasanjo's fate. National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed was a big loser, Tinubu said. He now has no prospects in government for 2003 and is out in the political cold struggling for his survival. Ambassador Jeter pointed out that IBB didn't deliver and was possibly the biggest loser of all despite having his tentacles in 5 parties. The Governor agreed, saying that IBB was "eaten like beef between two slices of bread". Tinubu said that IBB's problems began when Atiku refused to take IBB's bait to break with Obasanjo. He then conceded that if Atiku himself had decided to run, Tinubu was planning to be Atiku's Vice Presidential running mate.

19. (C) Ambassador Jeter shifted the discussion to state and local politics, asking the Governor's thoughts on political hot-spots. The Governor said that election violence in Kwara State was inevitable because ANPP's Governor Lawal was willing to play hardball in order to win the election. Tinubu postulated that Governor Lawal and PDP's Olu Saraki would likely split the vote in the center of the state; Lai Mohammed (formerly Tinubu's Chief of Staff) will be strong in the South while the Northern part of the state would be up for grabs. The Governor also predicted problems in Anambra, Enugu, Plateau, and Kaduna States. In Kaduna, Governor Tinubu said he expected the AD candidate to win. (NOTE: Not likely. END NOTE) He is also expecting AD victories in Borno and perhaps even Benue State. (NOTE: Borno is a possibility, but Benue is out of range. END NOTE)

110. (C) Comment: With his path to re-election relatively clear, Tinubu's most serious opponent is his own past and allegations of forged educational degrees that continue to hound him. More recent allegations that Tinubu forfeited \$460,000 in the U.S. to avoid charges of money laundering and even narcotics trafficking are the latest unconfirmed scandals. However, Tinubu appeared confident during this recent session; he overcame the allegations in 1999 and believes he can do the same this time around. As always, we found his take on the national political scene to be insightful. His assessment of the winners and losers tracks our own. Atiku and the governors were clear winners. Turning the normal political dynamic on its head, Obasanjo won because he was able to ride the coattails of his Vice President. Big losers were Alek Ekweume, NSA Mohammed and former Heads of State Babangida and Abdusalami Abubakar, whose support for Ekweume was insufficient to guarantee Obasanjo's defeat.

111. (C) Clearly a skilled politician, Governor Tinubu was frank but cautious and deliberate. Tinubu's point of view primarily reflects entrenched interests of the South but at the same time he was careful not to dismiss the power of the North. Tinubu is a man intent on covering all bases. Though an AD politician, like

his Deputy Governor, Tinubu is flexible and willing to follow wherever the pendulum of power swings. End Comment.

JETER